



U.S. Immigration  
and Customs  
Enforcement

Nov 14, 2005

# News Release

## **EIGHT SALVADORANS ARRESTED AND CHARGED WITH CONSPIRACY TO COMMIT SEX TRAFFICKING**

*Dozens of Central and South American females forced to work as "bargirls"*

HOUSTON, Texas — United States Attorney Chuck Rosenberg and Assistant Attorney General Wan Kim, Civil Rights Division of the Department of Justice, today announced the unsealing of criminal charges against eight persons for their roles in an organization allegedly involved in the sex trafficking of Central and South American females for Houston area bars and restaurants through force, fraud and coercion.

The federal criminal complaint, filed under seal on Sun. Nov. 13, alleges that the eight defendants, who are El Salvadoran nationals or U.S. Citizens of Salvadoran heritage, were part of an organization responsible for enticing and then smuggling young women, including minors, from El Salvador, Guatemala and Honduras into the United States through the Texas-Mexico border to work at their businesses to pay off their smuggling fees ranging from \$8,000 to \$13,000. Instead of the good jobs they were promised, the women were made to work as "bargirls," sitting and dancing with customers and selling overpriced drinks to the men. The bars in question employed as many as 30 women in such a capacity at any given time.

According to the complaint, one young woman reported earning between \$500 to \$600 a week selling drinks to male customers, but after paying assessments for a debt that incorporated alien smuggling fees, food, housing, clothing, and other miscellaneous items, she received approximately \$50 each week. In addition to this almost insurmountable debt, the complaint further alleges that the young women were maintained in service to the defendants by threats of violence and threats against their families. Furthermore, the complaint alleges that, as part of their compelled service, the defendants required the woman and girls to submit to the sexual demands of the defendants, bar patrons, or close associates of the defendants.

Late last evening, armed with warrants, investigating agents arrested Maximino MONDRAGON, also known as "Chimino", 57, the owner of El Potrero de Chimino Bar, located on the 12000 block of Hempstead Highway and the adjoining restaurant La Margarita; Victor Omar LOPEZ, 38, operator of the Mi Cabana Bar located on the 8100 block of West Tidwell Road;

Oscar MONDRAGON, 47, operator of the Mi Cabana Sports Bar located on the 8100 block of West Tidwell Road; Walter Alexander COREA, 39, the owner and operator of the El Cuco Restaurant located on the 8100 block of West Tidwell Road, adjoining the Mi Cabana bar; Kerin Josue SILVA, 19, son of Walter Corea; Olga MONDRAGON, 45, wife of Oscar and operator of the El Huetamo Nite Club (also known as the La Leona Club) located on the 1800 block of Ojeman Road, Maria FUENTES, 35, and Lorenza Reynosa, also known as "COMADRE", age unknown.

With the exception of "La Comadre," who will appear in federal court tomorrow, the remaining seven defendants appeared before United States Magistrate Judge Calvin Botley this afternoon at 2:00 p.m. The United States has sought the continued detention of each defendant without bond pending further criminal proceedings. A detention hearing has been scheduled for Thursday, November 17, 2005 at 10:00 a.m.

All eight defendants are charged with conspiring to recruit, entice, harbor, transport, provide and obtain by any means young Central and South American women and girls, and benefit, financially and by receiving a thing of value, from participation in a venture that engaged in such acts, knowing that force, fraud and coercion, would be used to cause these women and girls to engage in commercial sex acts. A charge of conspiracy carries a maximum penalty of five years imprisonment, and a \$250,000 fine.

During the course of the last evening's law enforcement action, approximately 100 women from Central and South America were taken into ICE custody on various immigration related issues. The investigation continues.

The criminal charges are the result of a year- long investigation conducted by members of the Human Trafficking Rescue Alliance (HTRA) in Houston, Texas, which includes the U.S. Immigration and Customs Enforcement (ICE), Federal Bureau of Investigation (FBI), the Harris County Sheriff's Office (HCSO), the Texas Alcoholic and Beverage Commission (TABC), with the assistance of the Constables Offices of Precincts One and Five, and the U. S. Customs and Border Protection. Assistant United States Attorneys Ruben R. Perez and Joe Magliolo and Department of Justice, Civil Rights Division, Trial Attorneys Lou de Baca and James Felte will prosecute the case.

# ICE #

*ICE, the primary investigative arm of the Department of Homeland Security, was established to bring a unified focus to the enforcement of U.S. immigration and customs laws, with the principal goal of preventing violations by terrorists and other criminals who threaten the nation's security.*